



For Immediate Release

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***ENZI SAYS HELP COMMITTEE APPROVES HEALTH
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LEGISLATION; CALLS FOR SWIFT
SENATE ACTION TO SAVE LIVES, REDUCE MEDICAL COSTS***

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today said the HELP Committee has approved the "Wired for Health Care Quality Act," a bill that will encourage the adoption of cutting-edge-information technologies in health care to improve patient care, reduce medical errors and cut health care costs.

"Doctors, hospitals, health care advocates, and the business community – including small business – are clamoring for Congress to take action and establish uniform health IT standards," Enzi said. "Time is of the essence – if we do not act, our health care system will move forward in a highly inefficient, fragmented and disjointed way. I urge Senate Leadership to bring our consensus legislation to the floor for consideration by the full Senate as soon as possible, so that we can establish an interconnected, nationwide health technology system to improve the quality of care in this country."

"This bill will eliminate duplicative tests and reduce medical errors. Moving from a paper-based health care system to secure electronic medical records will save lives and reduce skyrocketing health care costs."

Enzi said the bill will lay the foundation for technology and information sharing among doctors, hospitals, and insurers to ensure that patient data, insurance and medical histories are available wherever and whenever treatment is needed. A Rand Corporation study projected a potential savings of \$162 billion a year for the health care industry under the initiative.

"Information is power, and this bill puts that power in the hands of doctors and health professionals for the good of their patients," Enzi said. "I look forward to bringing this bill to the full Senate for debate so that we can pass health IT legislation and get the power of information to our doctors as quickly as possible."

The bill is cosponsored by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Chairman of the HELP Committee, Senator Enzi, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY).

THE WIRED FOR HEALTH CARE QUALITY ACT

Information technology is transforming all aspects of our modern society, but adoption of IT within health care has progressed slowly. IT systems linked securely and with strong privacy protections to patients' medical records can improve the quality and efficiency of care while producing significant cost savings. Despite the potential benefits of health IT, investment and adoption has been limited, particularly among smaller providers who are most affected by the financial cost of implementing a health IT system.

The legislation encourages the development of interoperability standards for health IT through:

- Codifying the role of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology in coordinating the policies of federal agencies regarding health IT.
- Establishing a public-private partnership known as the Partnership for Health Care Improvement to provide recommendations to the Secretary with regard to technical aspects of interoperability, standards, implementation specifications, and certification criteria for the exchange of health information. Requiring all federal IT purchases conform to the standards recommended by the Partnership and adopted by the President. Adoption of these standards is voluntary for private entities.
- Establishing the American Health Information Community as a body providing recommendations to the Secretary regarding policies to promote the development of a nationwide interoperable health information technology infrastructure. These include recommendations regarding patient privacy, information security, and appropriate uses of health information.

The legislation assures strong privacy protections for electronic health information by:

- Requiring that the national strategy on health IT includes strong privacy protections, including methods to notify patients if their medical information is wrongfully disclosed.

The legislation encourages the adoption of qualified health IT to improve the quality and efficiency of care by:

- Providing grants for the purchase of health IT systems to providers demonstrating financial need.
- Providing grants to states to establish low interest loan programs to help providers acquire health IT systems that will improve the quality and efficiency of health care.
- Providing grants to facilitate the implementation of regional or local health information plans to improve health care quality and efficiency through the electronic exchange of health information.

The legislation will help providers use IT to improve quality by:

- Providing grants to integrate qualified health IT in the clinical education of health professionals and encourage the use of decision support software to reduce medical errors.
- Requiring the Secretary to designate a single organization to develop healthcare performance measures.
- Establishing a Health Information Technology Resource Center where IT users can learn from the previous experience of others who have implemented qualified health IT.

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